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DENNIS ODA / DODA@STARBULLETIN.COM
Jeff and Peggy Hubbard accepted the Hawaii Medal of Honor yesterday for their son, Army Cpl. Nathan Hubbard, 21, who died in an Aug. 22 helicopter crash in Iraq.

Families accept isle Medal of Honor

STORY SUMMARY »

Families of 31 American servicemen who have died in the Middle East in the past year accepted the Hawaii Medal of Honor yesterday in a ceremony at the state Capitol.

The medal, created three years ago by the state Legislature, recognizes local residents and service members who were stationed in Hawaii when they were deployed.

As of Jan. 31, 217 people with ties to Hawaii have died while serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait.

The local recognition comes as the country marked the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the death toll of Americans killed in the conflict rose to 4,000.



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The Hawaii Medal of Honor was presented at the state Capitol yesterday to families of troops killed in the line of duty. Maj. Gen. Robert Lee, left, Elizabeth Aguirre-Jeffries, state Senate President Colleen Hanabusa and House Speaker Calvin Say posed for a photo after Aguirre-Jeffries received a medal on behalf of her late husband, Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Victor Jeffries.

By Mary Adamski

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Thirty-one military men with ties to Hawaii who died in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait in the past year were honored yesterday in a solemn ceremony at the state Capitol.

The Hawaii Medal of Honor was presented to the families of the servicemen "who died so we can live under the warmth of the blanket we know as freedom," said state House Speaker Calvin Say.

More than 300 people attended the event, the third annual ceremony to recognize the heroism of Hawaii residents as well as people who were stationed in Hawaii. Adm. Timothy Keating, U.S. Pacific commander, and Lt. Gen. Benjamin Mixon, commanding general of U.S. Army Pacific, were among more than 100 military service members in attendance.

"The medal is a small token of the tremendous debt of gratitude we can never repay," said Gov. Linda Lingle.

"This war falls heavy on all classes of people, most heavily on the soldier," said Maj. Gen. Robert G.F. Lee, state adjutant general. "Hawaii honors them."

Family members said they remember their fallen warriors in private, personal observances.

The Tulang family of Hilo marked the March 6 anniversary of the death of Navy Lt. Cmdr. Morgan Tulang by gathering at Mass at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Papaikou.

"We picked the Imiloa Astronomy Center restaurant for lunch; the stargazing center was a perfect place to remember Morgan," said his mother, Julie Tulang. "He was a science-fiction enthusiast, he loved the 'Star Wars' fiction. He had a hunger for reading ... for imagination and fact-finding."

Tulang was 36 when he died of an apparent heart attack on a Kuwait military base that supports troops in Iraq.

Tulang spent eight of his 10 years in the Navy stationed in Japan. His Japan-born wife, Megumi, and their

two small children now live with Tulang's parents in Hilo.

"He had so much more to do," said Julie Tulang. "God had other plans."

"I made a shrine at home with his photos and medals," said his father, Fabian Tulang.

For the family of Army Sgt. Alexander Gaglac, the state ceremony came just five days after they marked his 29th birthday by laying flowers on his grave in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. "We wrote messages to him on balloons and let them go," said his twin brother, Army Sgt. Alexis Gaglac, who also served a tour in Iraq.

The medal for Army Cpl. Nathan Hubbard, 21, will go on display in his family's home in Clovis, Calif. It's a memorial to two sons -- his brother Jared, a Marine, was killed in 2004 by a roadside bomb.

"We talk about him and keep him alive in our memory," said his father, Jeff Hubbard. When a special occasion like a birthday or holiday arrives, "Quite frankly it starts us grieving again."

Peggy Hubbard said the couple has spent time with Nathan's Army buddies here: "It was a help to us and a help to them."

Hubbard was one of 10 island-based soldiers killed in an Aug. 22 Black Hawk helicopter crash caused by mechanical problems.

Lee Ann Seideman of Lincoln, Ark., said she has reflected on the death of her son Army Spc. Tyler Seideman, 20, in the helicopter crash and realized that "60 years ago my grandmother lost a 20-year-old son. My mother couldn't remember much about her older brother," and Seideman doesn't want that to happen with Tyler's younger sisters. "I'm making it a goal to remind us 'remember when Tyler did this,'" she said.

"I have a wall full of photos" and the medal will be added to that memorial, said Amber Schoolcraft of Plattsburgh, N.Y. It was only two months ago that her husband, Army Spc. Jon Schoolcraft III, was killed when his Stryker vehicle struck a homemade bomb in northern Iraq. The couple wed in November.

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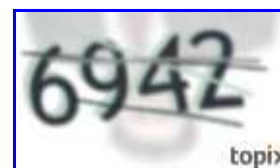
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